Mission Statements as Naming Proposals: An RSI Approach

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This study explores the communication process used to generate and express communication program mission "names." It argues that the process that underlies the creating, maintaining, and changing of names, ranging from the specific to the ideological, also generates academic unit "mission." Viewing mission texts through the lens of the rhetoric of social intervention model reveals how the texts reason rhetorically as they propose and provide evidence for the "appropriateness" of a unit's constituted mission name. Awareness of the rhetorical-reasoning pattern can help unit members make sense of mission-building or -revising work and provide a practical way for them to organize and critique their efforts. Furthermore, examining mission statements from an RSI approach highlights attention to the "incompleteness" of an academic unit's naming choices, which has practical implications for constructing mission statements and defining program "uniqueness."

Keywords: mission statement, rhetoric of social intervention, naming, assessment

In 1995, the *Journal of the Association of Communication Administration (JACA)* devoted an issue to case studies of communication department responses to the increasing threats of elimination, merger, or reorganization prompted by state and federal budget and financial aid cuts (Nelson, 1995). That same year, the National Communication Association (NCA) appointed a Task Force on Discipline Advancement (TFDA) "to recommend what departments and the Association might do to ensure that they and our discipline flourish" (Becker, 1999, p. 111). One recommendation was that communication programs link themselves more clearly to institutional missions to demonstrate their importance to achieving the missions (Nelson, 1995). Thus, TFDA created a document (Morreale, Clowers, & Jones, 1998) that provided guidelines for writing effective mission statements and mission statement examples to help programs make more visible institutional connections and "avoid being on a threatened list on their campuses" (Morreale, 1998, p. 5).

Although communication programs today may not face the same dangers of elimination or dispersion that prompted NCA's attention to missions in the 1990s, they continue to deal with the challenge of creating missions and mission statements. Mission statement development and review has evolved into a standardized practice typically expected of program review, assessment, and accreditation processes (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Paroske & Rosaen, 2012). "[M]ission statements are tangible proclamations whose content is likely to capture aspects of how organizations see themselves as well as how they want others to view them" (Palmer & Short, 2008, p. 454). Thus, communication programs are tasked with writing mission statements that proclaim or propose a "name" for interpreting the program's purpose and place in the institutional social system.

Researchers have analyzed college and university mission statements from discursive or rhetorical perspectives, mostly focusing on thematic commonalities and differences related to values, wording, and institutional types (e.g., Atkinson, 2007, 2008; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Morrish & Sauntson, 2013). However, they have yet to explore "mission" as a symbolically constituted "name," the rhetorical patterns that support the mission statement

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naming proclamation, or the practical implications of a mission's symbolic nature. Furthermore, researchers have investigated program or department mission statements in areas such as business, consumer studies, sociology, Christian education, engineering, and educational policy and management (e.g., Cochran & David, 1986; Creamer & Ghoston, 2012, Palmer & Short, 2008; Schmid, 1989). But communication mission statements have received almost no attention until recently when Allen et al. (2015) examined correspondences between communication department mission statements and institutional missions. Thus, this essay fills these gaps by viewing current communication missions and mission statements through the lens of the rhetoric of social intervention (RSI) model (Brown, 1978) to foreground the communication process generating their constitution and expression.

Specifically, the essay argues that like "ideology" (Brown, 1978), "mission" is constituted symbolically in social-system discourse and functions to provide meaning and order for social-system members, in this instance, academic units. Missions are expressed in texts that follow a pattern of rhetorical reasoning, which supports the academic unit's self-naming and attempts to shape constituencies' interpretation of the unit's purpose and place in the larger institutional social system. Furthermore, an RSI approach highlights attention to the "incompleteness" of an academic unit's naming choices, which has implications for constructing mission statements and defining program "uniqueness." In all, with its focus on the symbolic nature of missions and mission statements, the RSI perspective offers a practical communication framework for organizing a program's mission-building or -revising efforts.

To begin, the essay reviews recent and relevant mission statement and mission literature and describes the RSI approach used to examine the rhetorical-reasoning process constituting mission and mission statements. Next it exemplifies the perspective in an RSI analysis of current communication program mission statements. Then it reflects on the use of the RSI model as a framework for generating missions and statements and the practical implications of their "incompleteness" for mission statement construction and program "uniqueness." The paper concludes by considering limitations and future research.

Mission Statements and Missions

In the 1960s, the corporate world began advocating the need for firms to create "mission statements" to help promote images that would appeal to external publics to increase market share and unify a company's internal units (Mitchell, 2014). Business likely adopted the concept of "mission" from the military, which used the term to name the act of tasking soldiers with the achievement of specific goals (Berger, 2008; Mitchell, 2014). By the 1970s, "a furor over mission statements" had "swept over corporate America" (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 457) and, by the late 1980s, had made its way into academic discourse (Morrish & Sauntson, 2013). In 2006, Morphew and Hartley described the apparent need for higher education mission statements as "ubiquitous" (p. 456). "Accreditation agencies demand them, strategic planning is predicated on their formulation, and virtually every college and university has one available for review" (p. 456). As academic institutions began identifying and expressing their missions, they also attributed to their academic units (e.g., programs, departments, and schools) the need to demonstrate how their existence supported the institutional mission so as to promote institutional unity or reveal units that could be cut or reorganized (Berger, 2008; Hale & Redmond, 1995; Meacham, 2008). Thus, academic

units began constituting their own mission statements in discourse that attempted to tie their purpose to the realization of the institutional mission.

In mission statement literature, scholars have focused on identifying attributes that construct the concept "mission statement." For example, they have highlighted the behaviors that reify corporate mission statements (Bart, 1998; Fairhurst, Jordan, & Neuwirth, 1997), the types of discourse that constitute mission statements (Swales & Rogers, 1995; Williams, 2008), and the ways in which they differ from the concepts "vision," "goal," and "ethical codes" (Fairhurst et al., 1997; Mitchell, 2014). As Bart (2001) explained, "In their most basic form, a mission statement is a formal written document intended to capture an organization's unique *raison d'être*" (p. 360). He indicated that corporate mission statements include these features: "why do we exist, what is our real purpose and what are we trying to accomplish" (p. 360). Holland and Nichele (2016) categorized corporate mission statement as "foundational documents," which they defined as "texts that provide a pervasive cultural metanarrative" and offer organizational members "a cohesive measure of role stability, ethical guidance, utopian visionary goals, and strategic coherence" (p. 80).

Institutional Mission Statements

In academia, institutional mission statements typically embody components related to teaching, service, and scholarship to fulfill expectancies associated with institutions categorized as "higher education" (Allen et al., 2015; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). NCA's 1998 mission statement publication defined "mission statement" as "a summative declaration of a corporation or organization's (department/program) philosophical ideals that subsume some combination of the corporate/organizational mission, vision, and values" (Morreale et al., p. 3). The document listed eight qualities that academic unit mission statements should reflect: centrality to university mission, disciplinary anchors, positive messages and image, a well-written sense of direction, measurable goals, departmental uniqueness, aspirations, and adaptation to stakeholders (Morreale et al., 1998).

In general, the constitution and communication of academic mission statements has become a normative part of assessment and strategic planning in higher education. They "exist because they are expected to exist" (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 458). Furthermore, institutional mission statements "serve a legitimizing function," "show that the organization in question understands the 'rules of the game,'" and are required if an institution wants "to be considered a legitimate college or university by, among others, accrediting agencies and board members" (p. 458). Similarly, an academic unit within the institution gains legitimacy by creating a mission statement that demonstrates the unit's connection to the institutional mission (MacDoniels, 1999). However, organizations can constitute and communicate their purpose by means other than textual statements, such as in organizational culture, traditions, rituals, and events (Feldner, 2006; MacDoniels, 1999).

Academic Unit Mission Statements

Most studies of higher education mission statements have focused on the institutional level, although a few have examined statements at the academic unit level. For example, Schmid (1989) described a sociology department's steps to construct a mission statement and the curricular changes that resulted. Schmid observed that the statement creation process offered a way for unit members to "derive and articulate a collective understanding of who they are" and what they practice (p. 323). Creamer and Ghoston

(2012) explored the potential influence of mission statement themes, finding that colleges and schools of engineering that incorporated diversity language in their statements tended to have higher enrollments of women. Scholars also have analyzed business school mission statements for their effectiveness, diversity, and incorporation of accrediting initiatives (e.g., Cochran & David, 1986; Monds, Wang, & Bennett, 2012; Palmer & Short, 2008).

Communication program missions and mission statements have tended to be discussed briefly in literature concerning disciplinary questions and curriculum. For example, Delia (1982) alluded to mission in a commentary about issues that influenced what he called "departmental focus." Wartella (1996) mentioned "teaching mission" in a reflection on factors that resulted in communication programs failing to be perceived as central to a university's mission. Redmond and Waggoner (1992) and Rakow (1995) touched on mission statements as premises for guiding their programs' curricular revisions. Hale and Redmond (1995) identified their program's failure to connect clearly to the university mission as influencing their institution's perception that the communication unit was unneeded. Most recently, Allen et al. (2015), in a random selection of communication department web pages, found that 81 of the 100 sites examined included mission statements, and 64 of the 81 departments had mission statements that linked to their institutional missions. They also noted that over half of the communication mission statements mentioned "career preparation, skills development, and references to integrating practice with theory" (p. 64).

Mission Definitions

In writing about mission statements, researchers typically have assumed that the meaning of "mission" is commonly understood. In a review of literature related to a mission-building study, Feldner (2006) observed that, despite scholars' frequent discussions about the development and implementation of mission statements, "concrete definitions of mission are relatively scarce" (p. 71). When researchers have defined "mission," they usually do so in a few words, such as an organization's purpose, reason for being, *raison d'être*, or sense of shared expectation or worth (e.g., Atkinson, 2008; Fairhurst et al., 1997; Monds et al., 2012; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Palmer & Short, 2008). The NCA mission statement document characterized "mission" as "the organizational (departmental/programmatic) purpose, which is distinct from vision (future direction) and values (principles)" (Morreale et al., 1998, p. 3). The TFDA subcommittee recommended that a communication program's mission should "include commitment to providing theoretically-grounded education" and "be clear about the way theoretical elements of our discipline relate to the institution's mission" (MacDoniels, 1999, p. 146).

More recently, Khalifa (2012) has argued that a clearer definition of "mission" is needed because of inconsistences in or lack of definitions he found in a comprehensive review of mission statement literature. He proposed that "mission" be defined as "a resolute commitment to create a significant value or outcome in service of a worthy cause—a cause that the members of the organization admire and be willing to exert their attention and energy in its pursuit" (p. 242). Khalifa explained that this categorization incorporated attributes associated with "soft human needs and hard organizational requirements" by providing both a sense of meaning for the human being and a sense of direction for the organization (p. 243). In addition, Khalifa contended that the definition prompted organizations to make "a choice among competing alternatives," thus developing their own "unique" and "authentic" missions (p. 243).

Influences on Missions

However, various factors may influence organizations' attempts to constitute and express mission "uniqueness" or "authenticity." For example, in analyses of university mission statements, Atkinson (2007) and Morrish and Sauntson (2013) found more similarities than differences in institutional mission emphases. Atkinson (2007) speculated that rather than creating unique purposes, institutions might be borrowing mission statement metaphors from other apparently "successful" similar institutions in hopes of emulating their success. Morphew and Hartley (2006), who analyzed more than 300 U.S. university and college mission statements, suggested that the values of an institution's benefactors may influence how an organization constitutes its mission. They hypothesized that academic institutions "may be using mission statements not for planning or cultural purposes, but as a means of telling important stakeholders outside the institution that 'we understand what you want and we're going to deliver it to you'" (p. 470). Furthermore, to fulfill the attributed need for a mission statement, organizations may invent "fabricated" or "inauthentic" missions, which Khalifa (2012) claimed are recognizable by their "vagueness, lack of choice, feel-good formulations, etc." and fail to fool those close to the organization (p. 246).

A factor influencing communication program mission creation has been the discipline's apparent lack of centrality and clear identity (Beadle & Schmidt, 1999; Redmond & Waggoner, 1992; Wartella, 1996). In 1990, Smith and Hunt expressed hope that the then burgeoning assessment movement would lead to the creation of disciplinary identity because they argued that meaningful assessment required a discipline to be able to define itself. However, they noted that achieving this result would be difficult because "communication departments have benefited from absorbing every aspect of social and humanistic study into a global concept of communication. No academic field has attempted to be more things to more people than 'communication'" (p. 3). In 1995, the Association for Communication Administration (ACA) attempted to prompt centrality by proposing a disciplinary definition that emphasized the "diversity, breadth, and depth of the field itself" (Korn, Morreale, & Boileau, 2000, p. 40). "The field of communication focuses on how people use messages to generate meanings within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media. The field promotes the effective and ethical practice of human communication" (Korn et al., 2000, p. 40). A 1999 ACA member survey found that most respondents viewed the definition as potentially useful for developing program mission statements (Korn et al., 2000). In 2000, Morreale, Osburn, and Pearson (2000) argued for communication's centrality in higher education, based on a review of 100 publications, including books, newspaper and journal articles, and conference papers, that highlighted the importance of communication. They defined the communication discipline as "an essential component of the educational enterprise" because the study of communication "develops the whole person, improves the work of education, advances the interests of society, bridges cultural differences, and advances careers and the work of business" (p. 25). More recently, Paroske and Rosaen (2012), like Smith and Hunt (1990), argued that assessment could be a means for "discovering what communication *is*" (p. 110). They suggested that their proposed meta-assessment approach, modeled after Craig's (1999) attempt to unite the field meta-theoretically, might help communication programs find unity and potentially lead to disciplinary centrality.

In all, higher education institutions and academic units have assumed and acted upon the apparent need to construct missions and express them in public statements. Scholars have examined the attributes and purposes of mission statements and missions, primarily at

the institutional level. They also have highlighted the lack of or inconsistencies in "mission" definitions and factors that may influence the construction of "unique" missions. In addition, they have suggested elements that communication program missions and statements should include and have attempted to define and explicate the centrality of the discipline to aid in mission development. However, uninvestigated is the centrality of the communication process in constituting and promoting missions and mission statements to which attention now turns.

An RSI Approach

A starting point for exploring the communication process generating mission and mission statement constitution is Brown's (1978, 1982, 1986, 1987) rhetoric of social intervention model, which directs attention to the symbolic nature of "ideology" and, by extension, "mission." Although the RSI model primarily has served as a framework for analyzing communication as the driver of social-system change (e.g., DeBord, 2009; Gring, 1998; Opt, 2012; Opt, 2013; Opt, 2015; Snyder, 2009), this study uses the model as a method for uncovering the communication process by which academic unit social systems constitute and reason for missions.

Ideology and Naming

The RSI model is based on the assumption that social systems discursively construct overarching interpretations of experience or "ideology," which Brown (1978) defines as "any symbolic construction of the world in whose superordinate 'name' human beings can comprehensively order their experience and subsume their specific activities" (p. 124). Ideology provides "a fundamental sense of order, meaning, and comprehensive explanation for all of experience" (Opt & Gring, 2009, p. 57). Ideology is constituted by and shapes how we communicatively create, maintain, and challenge social-system interpretations of needs, power, and experience (Brown, 1978).

The definition of ideology as a "superordinate name" arises out of the model's foundational assumption that "naming," or the transformation of physical and conceptual experience into symbols, is our most fundamental human activity (Brown, 1978). In essence, we constitute and communicate identity, relationships, and attention to experience by symbolic categorizing or naming. A "name" can range from a label given to a specific symbolic categorization of experience (e.g., "dog," "cat") to an overarching symbolically constituted social-system narrative (e.g., American dream, Russian dream) (Opt & Gring, 2009). In all, as we communicate, we construct, maintain, and change a symbolic "reality" that gives us a sense of meaning, order, and control (Brown, 1978; Opt & Gring, 2009).

Rhetorical Reasoning and Incompleteness

Brown (1972) argues that this constitutive naming process follows a pattern of rhetorical reasoning, described as "the statement of a name," "a statement of its appropriateness," and "a statement of the expected or appropriate response" or "a listing of reasons that the categorizing of reality is accurate" (p. 377). In essence, to give meaning to experience, we categorize it symbolically by proposing a name that seems to "fit" or make sense of experience. We support our naming claim, or its "appropriateness" for interpreting experience, by communicatively emphasizing aspects of experience that exemplify our social

system's agreed-upon defining or "criterial" attributes that constitute the name (Brown, 1972; Bruner, Goodnow, & Austin, 1965). For instance, when a person fires a weapon in a school or shopping mall, social-system members attempt to make sense of the experience communicatively by attributing a name, such as "psychotic individual" or "terrorist." They argue for the "appropriateness" of the naming proposal by discursively highlighting how aspects of the experience, such as the person's apparent background, nationality, and motives, are the same as the criterial attributes associated with the proposed name. The negotiated name creates expectancies about why the person acted and how the social system should response to the action (Opt & Gring, 2009).

However, a tenet of the RSI model is that names and, by extension, ideology, are always "incomplete." To constitute names, we must abstract from experience by communicatively "foregrounding" and "backgrounding" attention to it like when we label a figure/ground illustration as "face" or "vase" (Brown, 1978; Opt & Gring, 2009). As Burke (1966) put it, words act as "terministic screens," directing our attention toward and away from certain interpretations of experience. Thus, we can disagree about the "appropriate" name to attribute to experience (e.g., "psychotic individual" or "terrorist"), depending on what we rhetorically feature and mask attention to in experience (Brown, 1982). Furthermore, we may become aware of "gaps," or experience that seems to violate expectancies prompted by a name or ideology, such as when expectancies encouraged by the American dream tenet "hard work leads to success" go unfulfilled (Brown, 1982; Opt & Gring, 2009). By reasoning rhetorically, we can propose naming and ideological alternatives or revisions to our symbolic reality that seem more "complete" so as to preserve a sense of meaning about and understanding of ourselves, others, and day-to-day experience (Brown, 1978, 1982; Opt & Gring, 2009).

Missions as Names

From an RSI perspective, "mission" can be defined as an overarching "name" constituted symbolically by academic unit members to make sense of their unit's nature and purpose. In essence, mission can be considered the academic unit social system's "ideology" because it enables members to "order their experience and subsume their specific activities" (Brown, 1978, p. 124). Furthermore, like ideology, mission influences members' interpretations of needs, power, and attention to experience, just as those interpretations shape mission creation. Like all symbolic constructions, missions are "incomplete," for in constituting their "unique" or "authentic" mission, members make choices (Khalifa, 2012)— all missions are abstracted symbolically, constituted by communicatively featuring and masking attention to aspects of a unit's experience (Brown, 1982). Finally, mission and ideology are intertwined in that a social system's ideology influences what academic unit members attend to in constituting mission, just as the constitution of mission helps reify social-system ideology.

However, unlike ideology, which is created, maintained, and changed symbolically in a wide range of ongoing social-system conversations and texts (Brown, 1978), academic unit members typically negotiate and formalize missions in settings such as committee and faculty meetings (e.g., Schmid, 1989). The outcome of their mission-constituting activity usually appears as texts, or mission statements, published on the unit's web site or in catalogs and strategic planning documents. From an RSI perspective, a mission statement communicates a unit's proposed self-name, which promotes an interpretation of and expectancies about the unit's nature and purpose. Besides stating the name, the mission statement also provides

evidence for the "appropriateness" of the unit's naming choices. In essence, mission statements are forms of rhetorical reasoning designed to intervene in how constituencies interpret a unit's institutional purpose.

Communication Mission Texts

To see more clearly the naming and rhetorical-reasoning patterns underlying academic unit mission statements, NCA's 2014 list of 808 undergraduate communication program web sites (available at http://www.natcom.org/data/members/#Databases) was used to find communication program mission texts. Each link appearing in the list was clicked, and working links were considered for analysis. Links that connected to programs with graduate studies only were excluded because of possible mission differences between undergraduate and graduate levels. Next, each undergraduate program web site was searched for a mission statement. Similar to what Allen et al. (2015) found in their collection of mission statements from communication department web pages, some missions appeared as texts on a page or under a title explicitly labeled with words such as "mission statement" or "our mission." Other times, the unit's mission was implied in texts that began with words such as "our goal," "our purpose," "our aim," "our focus," or "our commitment." In addition, some mission statements ran one sentence while others were paragraphs. In all, 216 communication program mission statements were compiled for analysis. Following the RSI method, the texts first were read closely to identify patterns in the types of self-names that academic units were proposing in their mission statements. Then, the texts were read again to detect patterns of rhetorical reasoning being used to support the academic units' naming proposals. The next section provides an overview of the key names emerging from the RSI analysis.

Rhetorical-Reasoning Process

In the communication mission texts analyzed, academic unit members' symbolic categorizations of themselves tended to be organized around the taken-for-granted purposes of an academic institution—teaching, research, and service, an institutional naming pattern observed by Morphew and Hartley (2006) and Allen et al. (2015). As shown in the following analysis, these purposes were communicated in the types of words used to construct mission statements.

Teaching Names

In the majority of the communication mission statements examined, unit members constituted and attributed to themselves the name "teacher" to make sense of their purpose. Rarely was that role specifically mentioned in the texts; rather the name was implied by what the statements claimed was the members' reason for being. They are here to "educate," "prepare," "equip," "empower," and "develop," all attributes associated with the symbolic category "teacher." Some mission texts offered additional support for the "teacher" naming by describing types of content taught, such as communication theory, research, skills, and practices, and types of teaching methods used, such as engaged learning, experiential learning, and seminars.

In addition, the mission statements often reasoned rhetorically for the "appropriateness" of the "teacher" name by emphasizing the ultimate purpose associated

with that symbolic category—to bring about change in knowledge and/or skills, thereby advancing people and the world. For example, students become more "effective" or "better" in enacting roles such as "leaders," "critical thinkers," "problem-solvers," "speakers," "writers," "researchers," "consumers of information," "competitors," "community/global participants," "local/global citizens," "advocates" and "future graduate students." Alternatively, they become more "effective" or "better" in enacting particular actions, such as "working together," "meeting workplace challenges," "navigating a changing world," "synthesizing complex information," "creating, designing, and delivering messages," "transforming society," "excelling in many fields and professions," "engaging in lifelong learning," "achieving personal and professional success," and "appreciating and practicing communication." In all, as unit members expressed their nature and purpose in mission texts, they tended to chose and promote the name "teacher."

Research Names

Besides "teacher," the analysis of the mission texts indicates academic unit members constituted and attributed to themselves the name "scholar" or "researcher." In a few cases, only the "scholar" and not the "teacher" name was mentioned in a mission statement. In most instances, "scholar" tended to be less emphasized than "teacher." This difference may reflect variations in institutional mission expectations, with "scholar" being foregrounded at universities that name "research" as their mission. Unlike "teacher," the role "scholar" or "researcher" often was expressed explicitly in statements like "we are scholars who…" or "we are a community of researchers who…." When not, the name was implied in attributes associated with that symbolic category, such as "explore," "study," "generate," "examine," and "advance." Some of the statements further promoted the "appropriateness" of the "scholar" naming by describing briefly types of experience studied, such as "the crucial role of communication in human relationships," "the exchange of messages in interpersonal and mediated situations," "communication processes," "communication's influence on identity," "creation and negotiation of meaning," and "communication's impact on society," or types of methods used, such as "socio-cultural, evolutionary, and biological approaches," "a wide range of humanistic and scientific methods," and "pluralistic perspectives."

In addition, at times, the mission statements reasoned rhetorically that unit members are "scholars" or "researchers" by directing attention to how their actions embodied the ultimate scholarly purpose of "bettering" the discipline and/or society. For example, the knowledge gained when they act as "scholars" or "researchers" "contributes to scholarly knowledge that unites the field," "creates a more humane world," "furthers the study, teaching, and practice of communication," "enriches human interaction," "enhances a region's/state's social/economic conditions," "answers questions," "generates new knowledge about communication practices," and "improves the human condition." In all, some of the communication program mission statements provided evidence that in addition to meeting the expectancies associated with the name "teacher," unit members also fulfilled those linked with the symbolic category "scholar" or "researcher."

Service Names

Finally, in the texts analyzed, linkages to the third expectancy of academic institutions, "service," tended to be less emphasized or developed as compared to unit members' naming themselves as "teachers" and/or "scholars." The texts never proposed a

specific role name, such as "servant," but implied the name in mentions of attributes associated with that symbolic category, such as "serving," "helping," and "working with." To add support to the "service" naming, the mission statements sometimes indicated the recipient of the action, such as the "college, university, community, and profession," "external constituencies," or "metropolitan region." In a few cases, the mission statements reasoned rhetorically by highlighting attention to an ultimate "service" purpose of "enhancing" a community or society, such as "to improve their communication practices," "to improve the quality of communication in everyday life," and "to improve communication and aid problem solving." In all, although the mission statements sometimes highlighted "service" as an action to which unit members "are committed," "dedicated," or "contribute," the texts provided little support for the "appropriateness" of the naming proposal.

Name Constitution and Reflections

Overall, analyzing current communication mission statements through the RSI model lens reveals a pattern of rhetorical reasoning underlying the mission text constructions. In essence, the mission statements propose an academic unit "name" and support its "appropriateness" or its "fit" in explaining the academic unit's purpose. Unit members can use awareness of this pattern as a framework for organizing and making sense of their attempts to build and express a mission. They can focus on how their talk to create or revise a unit mission functions as naming proposals and attend to the rhetorical-reasoning process that members use to advance their mission propositions. For example, in proposing the name "teacher" or actions associated with teaching (e.g., "prepare," "equip"), unit members can reflect on how they constitute the name symbolically, what they consider to be the criterial attributes of "teacher," and how they interpret themselves as enacting these attributes. In so doing, they can consider the types of evidence their mission statement provides to support the "appropriateness" of the "teacher" name they have attributed to themselves.

Mission Name Incompleteness

Besides providing a way to understand the constitution and expression of mission, the RSI model offers a framework to help mission builders to reflect on and respond to the potential "incompleteness" of their symbolic constructions. The RSI model's conception of "incompleteness" can be applied to the mission statement development process in several ways, ranging from a review of the rhetorical-reasoning process to a consideration of mission "uniqueness." To begin, academic units might analyze their mission texts for "incompleteness" by attending to potential "gaps" in the rhetorical-reasoning process generating the texts. For example, a mission statement might state simply that a unit's mission is "teaching, research, and service," as occurred in a couple of the communication program mission texts, without providing evidence to back the naming claim. Although such a mission constitution suggests a unit purpose in line with expected higher education institutional missions, it assumes that the unit's constituencies share the unit members' interpretation of what it means to "teach," "research," and "serve" and how the unit uniquely contributes to the institutional mission. Furthermore, as the analysis of communication mission texts indicated, a statement might provide more evidence for one aspect of a unit's mission than another. For instance, most of the examined communication

mission statements proposed "service" as part of the unit members' mission, but failed to demonstrate the "appropriateness" of that naming. Thus, when constituting missions and mission statements, builders can reflect on the adequacy of the rhetorical reasoning generating the naming proposals and consider potential influences on constituencies' interpretation of the academic unit.

Another way academic unit members might assess the "incompleteness" of their mission texts is by considering the abstractive or "terministic screen" nature of names (Brown, 1978; Burke, 1966). As this analysis of the communication program mission statements and Morphew and Hartley (2006) and Allen et al. (2015) have indicated, unit members tend to construct missions in which they name themselves "teachers," "researchers," and "servants." Yet, from an RSI perspective, in promoting attention to these names, members communicatively mask attention to alternative potentialities for categorizing themselves symbolically. For example, a few of the communication program mission statements named the members as "contributors," "collaborators," "integrators," and "colleagues," which highlight rhetorically other aspects of the academic unit members' experience. Furthermore, an assumption of the RSI model is that all ideological names communicate social-system interpretations of needs and power (Brown, 1978), which is also reflected in mission names. For instance, "teacher" implies that the unit members' purpose or mission is to meet students' knowledge or skills needs in a complementary social hierarchy (Brown, 1986) whereas a name such as "collaborator" indicates a more equal exchange of needs-meeting behavior in a social hierarchy that emphasizes reciprocal power (Brown, 1986). Thus, mission builders can consider the "incompleteness" of their symbolic categorizations in terms of how their chosen mission names feature and mask attention to alternative aspects of the academic unit's identity, needs, and power.

Finally, academic unit members might consider mission statement "incompleteness" in reasoning rhetorically for the "uniqueness" of the unit's contribution to the institutional mission. The 1998 NCA mission statement publication suggested that a mission statement include a "declaration" of "philosophical ideals" and indicate "disciplinary anchors" and "departmental uniqueness" (Morreale et al., p. 3). For the most part, the analyzed mission texts provided evidence to support naming unit members "teachers," "scholars," and "servants," and, at times, they indicated "uniqueness" and "disciplinary anchors" by emphasizing what the members teach (e.g., communication knowledge and skills) and research (e.g., symbolizing activity, messages) and how they serve (e.g., helping others improve their communication). Assumed is that the attention to "communication" makes the unit "unique" compared to the institution's other academic units. However, some of the examined communication program mission statements failed to specify "uniqueness" and presented missions that might be common to other disciplines, such as "to prepare students as leaders in their communities and careers" or "to prepare students to enter a wide variety of diverse professions." Furthermore, because "communication" is a symbolic abstraction, academic unit constituencies may constitute "communication" differently from unit members and so fail to interpret the unit's mission as "unique." In a few cases only did the analyzed communication program mission texts propose attributes of "communication," such as "how meaning is created and negotiated in human interaction," "storytelling," and "how human beings create, transmit, receive, and respond to messages." Thus, by examining the rhetorical-reasoning process generating the mission texts, mission builders can reflect on how they are constituting and advocating the "uniqueness" of their communication mission within their respective institutions and defining the discipline.

Conclusions

In all, this essay has argued that the same communication process that underlies the creating, maintaining, and changing of names, ranging from the specific to the ideological, also generates academic unit "mission." Viewing mission texts through the lens of the RSI model reveals the rhetorical-reasoning pattern constituting mission texts as they propose and provide evidence for the "appropriateness" of a unit's mission name. As Schmid (1989) noted, in the process of creating mission statements, program members get a better sense of who they are and what they do—a sense that likely comes from categorizing themselves symbolically as names give a sense of meaning, understanding, and control (Brown, 1978). Awareness of the rhetorical-reasoning pattern can help unit members make sense of and organize their mission-building or -revising efforts. Furthermore, examining missions and mission statements from an RSI approach highlights attention to the "incompleteness" of an academic unit's naming choices. Given that Creamer and Ghosten (2012) found that mission statement wording potentially influences constituents' perceptions of a discipline, then awareness of "incompleteness" can enable mission builders to reflect on what is being featured and masked in their naming choices.

As scholars have pointed out, a clear limitation in studying mission statements is their potential lack of "authenticity," lack of importance to constituencies, and influences that shape their construction (Khalifa, 2012). Academic units may constitute "inauthentic" mission texts to fulfill institutional expectations and/or to appeal to constituencies as opposed to developing mission texts that reflect how they interpret their purpose (Atkinson, 2007; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Morrish & Sauntson, 2013). Also unit members and their constituencies may be unaware of or fail to attend to a unit's mission statement. Thus, the mission text may differ from how unit members or others interpret the academic unit's purpose (Atkinson, 2008; Fairhurst et al., 1997). Furthermore, Berger (2008) suggests that corporate missions, emphasizing profit, efficiency, and goal achievement, have shaped academic institutions' mission focus, and, in turn, academic unit missions. Thus, future research should explore these aspects of academic unit mission in more depth to better understand factors that may influence mission statement understandings and emphases. However, regardless of "authenticity" or the pressures shaping academic unit mission creation, the communication process of generating and expressing mission remains the same.

Because this study of missions focused on academic units' expression of their missions in texts on program web sites, analyzing discourse from academic unit meetings about mission construction and revision might provide more insight into the rhetorical-reasoning process and program members' choices when constituting missions. The discussions might reveal whether the mission statement reflects how unit members "authentically" see themselves or whether other factors, such as stakeholder expectations, have influenced mission development. Moreover, although this study limited its attention to the rhetorical-reasoning patterns constituting mission texts, a cursory review of the types of content and activities emphasized in the mission statements suggests that they fail to reflect a common "disciplinary" identity. As several scholars noted, a potential hindrance to constituting communication program missions has been the lack of centrality and definition of the discipline (Beadle & Schmidt, 1999; Redmond & Waggoner, 1992; Wartella, 1996). The absence of disciplinary centrality in the mission statements may indicate that the academic units' mission constituting efforts are more for institutional compliance than disciplinary commitment. For example, from the RSI perspective, the mission creators discursively may be foregrounding the need construct missions to cooperate with

institutional stakeholders' demands for a mission statement and, as a side effect, masking attention to the core questions and purposes that might unite the communication discipline. Thus, more work is needed to examine to constituting academic unit mission "authenticity" and its potential for building disciplinary identity.

Finally unconsidered in this study are the ways in which academic unit missions both shape and are shaped by the ideology of the social system in which the academic unit is located. A clue to this influence may be glimpsed in the analyzed mission statements' assumption that the ultimate purpose of teaching, research, and service is to "improve" or "better" people, communities, and society. In essence, academic social systems appear to be organized around the apparent overarching name of "making the world a better place," an expectancy traditionally linked with "American dream" ideology (Brown, 1970; Opt & Gring, 2009). The examined mission texts suggest that communication program academic units are focused on maintaining a version of ideology that emphasizes perfecting people and society. For example, members teach knowledge and skills that give students the attributes needed to be "successful," do research that leads to "progress" in understanding communication, and engage in service that promotes "freedom" and "equality." This emphasis may reflect Berger's (2008) concern that academic mission statements reflect the "corporate" expectancy of goal achievement. Thus, future research should explore how in reasoning rhetorically to constitute overarching academic unit missions, academic units also are discursively linking their missions to the achievement of a current interpretation of ideology. Perhaps in reflecting more critically on their symbolically constituted missions, academic units could play a great role in creating alternatives to or revising existing ideology.

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